

EPISODE 117

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist, brought to you by OnePitch. The guests on our show include some of the most notable journalists from the top US-based publications, who cover topics including technology, lifestyle and culture, health, science, consumer products, business news and beauty and wellness. We discuss their role, the types of stories they cover, what their inbox looks like and how they connect with sources. Head to onepitch.co and look for the video page to learn more about our new video series featuring journalists from the show.

Today we're joined by Capital B's National Health Reporter Margo Snipe. As a National Health Reporter, Margo covers critical issues affecting the mental and physical health of black Americans. She digs into how racial bias and medicine impacts black Americans lives and investigates inequities in the American health care system. During the episode, Margo shares more about her role at Capital B, the various types of pitches in her inbox, sources she's looking to connect with, and more. Let's hear from Margo now.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:20] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is OnePitch's, Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. I created OnePitch, because publicist need a better way to understand what journalists needs are and also journalists can be our friends. I also run Bam, which is an agency, also VR marketing agency that works with all venture-backed startups. We definitely need our media friends to help us get all the stories done.

Today, how exciting. Margo Snipe is here. She's from Capital B. We'll talk about Capital B in just a second. She's a national health reporter. Welcome, Margo.

[00:01:54] MS: Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

[00:01:56] BB: This is fun. We already had a fun time, Margo, with our videos so far. We are rolling. Margo, first thing for people, maybe not as familiar, and I do this more often with outlets that are the New York Times. What is Capital B?

[00:02:10] MS: This is something I had to get used to, all my emails, when I'm reaching out to people, I have to tell them up front at the top of the email what Capital B is. Every time I call I have to tell people who where we are, because no one knows yet. We just launched – ago, but Capital B is a new nonprofit newsroom, founded by some amazing black women. Lauren and Akoto, and our mission is to cover black communities across the country. We have a variety of different beats. We have a national team, which I'm a part of, where we have health reporting, which I do. We're about to bring in an education reporter or criminal justice reporter. We just brought in an environment reporter. We cover big issues affecting the black community from a national perspective. We also have our first local newsroom in Atlanta doing the same thing, but locally within the community.

[00:03:02] BB: Local News? You mean, Margo. Oh, my God. Wow. Fantastic.

[00:03:08] MS: I love that about Capital B, it's like, I can be a national reporter, but we work so closely with local news and we're trying to expand other cities that it's still pretty local.

[00:03:17] BB: Yes. Excellent. Okay, so now let's go into your inbox. Do you have a lot of pitches in there? What's happening?

[00:03:25] MS: I was at the Tampa Bay Times before Capital B. I definitely get less pitches at Capital B, just because we're so new. I'm actually, I'm okay with that.

[00:03:36] BB: Yeah. You're like, "Wait a second, this is great."

[00:03:39] MS: Yeah. I did a few pitches, but the pitches that I get are either really out of left field or they're very hyper specific.

[00:03:50] BB: Okay. What's an example of when you're like, "Yeah, no." You don't have to say who, by the way, you just give us general.

[00:03:57] MS: I can read you a line of one that I got an hour ago –

[00:04:02] BB: Yes. Oh, my gosh. Yes, yes, we love, real deal, yes. Go ahead.

[00:04:05] MS: High THC Snacks Pose Threat to Kids, Cannabis and Nurses Association
Experts and family nurses weigh in.

[00:04:12] BB: Wait. What? Wait, I'm already lost.

[00:04:15] MS: Yeah.

[00:04:17] BB: Yeah. Okay, that's subject line. Yeah.

[00:04:19] MS: Well, I know exactly what we're getting. I just haven't written about edibles, at least yet, and I know that that's what the email is.

[00:04:30] BB: Yeah.

[00:04:30] MS: I get stuff like that. I also have one says, As masks go down, how to keep yourself healthy with three simple routines. I also have a political release. It's nice to have those flowing in case you are doing a story that happens to hit on with your releasing out, but yeah, those are sitting in my inbox.

[00:04:53] BB: Okay. Now, Margo, you were in the rare circumstance where you don't have 57,000 email pitches from your last three and a half years at an outlet. So you have the moment right now to decide what you do with all these pitches. Do you have a system yet or any system? I mean, some people never have a system and they just let it ride, for example, and that's totally fine. Whatever works for you.

[00:05:19] MS: Yeah. I've always been pretty good at, I do open every email, mostly because I don't like the unread sitting high. I don't want to miss anything, but by the time it pops up on my phone or in my inbox, I know if it's something I'm going to read the whole thing for or skim or open it just so that it's not a notification in my inbox.

[00:05:48] BB: To keep it clean that way.

[00:05:49] MS: Yeah. Right now, I have seven unread emails and they're all chains that I've already been communicating with people.

[00:05:57] BB: Oh, okay. So those are good, valid ones.

[00:06:00] MS: Yeah, I know it's there for the most part.

[00:06:02] BB: That's good. Good. Okay. Margo, I've never had somebody so unique in this position before. It's fantastic.

[00:06:08] MS: Yeah.

[00:06:09] BB: Because you can craft your whole system accordingly.

[00:06:13] MS: Yeah. I don't know how other people do it, but.

[00:06:17] BB: All over the place, frankly, some are mass strict to litters, like they delete every single thing. There's quite the spectrum, strict to litters, absolutely zero at the end of the day, every day within minutes. There's definitely obsessed people, rare but obsessed. Then there's, yeah just let it ride. I have one person on here that had, I think the record is 200,000 something plus unread, yeah. Me personally, could not sustain myself in that forum, but to each their own on this wild world of journalism.

[MESSAGE]

[00:06:50] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to see the unique ways OnePitch helps PR professionals and marketers pitch journalists? Head to onepitch.co to learn about our new Onepitch score and see how easy it is to find the right journalists to pitch your news to. Sign up for your free account today.

Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:07:14] BB: We talk a little bit, Margo, about this on our video pieces, which are great. I encourage everyone to look at these quick videos that we filmed here, but for your pitching preferences and I'd say even since you got here a Capital B in January, we're filming this in, we're taping this in April, it's still relatively new. What are you looking for in a good pitch, one that you're like, "Yes, let me response."

[00:07:38] MS: It really varies, because right now I'm still in the process of figuring out exactly what the health B that Capital B should look like. One thing I'm always, always, always looking for doctors across the country to connect with, because I can find some on Twitter. There are a lot of them.

[00:07:59] BB: There are tons. Yeah.

[00:08:00] MS: Yeah. I also want to find the people who are not on Twitter and super loud and vocal. Let's diversify the people or the doctors and health professionals we're hearing from. I do get pitches that are like talk to this expert. The thing with those, though, is I'll get, it's Alcohol Awareness Month. I have this expert for you, and maybe I'm not writing about Alcohol Awareness Month, but I'll scroll down and I will copy that expert's name and contact info, because I know that they talk about addiction too. Maybe that road, I want to circle back about addiction more generally.

I also I'm trying to get out there with universities, so I get research in my inbox. Some of the pitches I just shared earlier. Yeah, I'm looking at a lot of different things, a lot of different research or just learning who's doing what work in the space.

[00:09:01] BB: Now are you at all, when you mentioned the doctors, open to then a pitch that's, "Hey, Margo, I have a really qualified doctor that specializes in X. Ever want to talk?" Is that something you'd be open to?

[00:09:16] MS: I would love that.

[00:09:17] BB: Okay.

[00:09:18] MS: I want these like, know about these nurses or this association that has to do with health. Capital B, we focus on black communities in particular. I would like those pitches to be relevant to that. Yeah, I always want to know about xyz doctor, xyz nurse, xyz research or research group or organization. Yeah, and definitely or just to add them to my crazy long list of everyone who does anything.

[00:09:50] BB: Yes. Let's look at this good info for everybody, I think to be looking here. So for the couple that you've been writing so far, Margo, like the recent ones, I'm looking at. Your reading list on maternal and reproductive health in America. You're talking about you have one recently about COVID-19 racial disparities makes white people care less, but there's an exception. There's organ transplants, I mean, you have a wide range here. Is there a way in which you brainstorm or have your thinking time for a story yet? Are you in the shower or are you on a walk? You go, "You know what I need to look at? I need to do a story about this." How are you processing your stories?

[00:10:31] MS: Well, if you ask my editor, she will tell you that anything that crossed my mind for 2.2 seconds is like a pitch that I've already started reporting. I need to –

[00:10:46] BB: Oh, okay.

[00:10:48] MS: I need a little bit more specific about what I'm reporting on, and I have a short story list.

[00:10:54] BB: You got you, because there's so much probably.

[00:10:56] MS: The ideas come from a lot of different places. Some of what I've written for Capital B already. Our story is that when I was at the Tampa Bay Times, I had written from a Tampa Bay perspective that I could circle back a year later on and do it from a national perspective. That happened with the story that I wrote about menthol Cigarette's. There was also, I came across some research on COVID 19, racial disparities making white people care less, knowing about those racial disparities made them less vigilant about masking or social distancing.

I was like, “Oh, my goodness.” I mean, for the work that I do, because that's my job to inquest disparities and highlight them. Also, what does that mean for the people who have been working in health equity forever? Well, let's report that out, maybe write that, because people are thinking the same thing I am. My latest was on a study that came in, Lauren, one of our co-founders. It came into her inbox and she forwarded it my way. We got the study on embargo. A lot of different moving parts.

[00:12:05] BB: Yeah. I'll say. So it sounds like there's no story structure necessarily that you're like, “Yeah, let me go to my story room and think to myself on anything.” It's like, no, it sounds like there's quite a flow of way too many stories to even tackle.

[00:12:19] MS: Yeah. Let's grab that and get on with it. That's kind of like it.

[00:12:23] BB: I like it. Okay, Margo in your a lot of free time, of what you have. Is there anything you are reading or watching, listening to, anything in there that we might also enjoy?

[00:12:36] MS: Well, recently, to turn my brain off, I have been watching *The Ultimatum*. I don't know if you have –

[00:12:43] BB: We also made it. No way.

[00:12:43] MS: It is the wildest reality TV show –

[00:12:48] BB: Marry or move on. On Netflix, of course.

[00:12:53] MS: Just to turn my brain off, but there's also some books I have right here on the table next to me. *Daring Greatly*, by Brene Brown.

[00:13:02] BB: Yes.

[00:13:03] MS: So good. I read it once. Then I was like, “Oh, my gosh, I'm so good at vulnerability.” Then I went to therapy and actually I'm not. So I'm like, “Let's re-read the book.”

[00:13:13] BB: I love that you schooled yourself. Never mind. Oh, that's good. Okay, anything else?

[00:13:19] MS: *Fates and Furies*. It's a Florida based novel. Then, of course, *Journalism Wise*, I am a big fan of Ed Young at The Atlantic and his coverage of the pandemic, which recently has really got to just talking about COVID deaths and how we've become so desensitized to them as a society and saying. Yeah, that's some of what I'm reading and watching.

[00:13:47] BB: I like it's. Oh, gosh. Wow. I'm looking at some of this stuff. He has an article here titled from last month, How Did This Many Deaths Become Normal?

[00:13:56] MS: Yep.

[00:13:56] BB: The US is nearing 1 million recorded COVID-19 deaths and we're just like, "No big deal."

[00:14:04] MS: Yeah.

[00:14:06] BB: Okay. Transitioning a little hard from that perhaps, Margo, but related. What do you think the future of journalism looks like.

[00:14:16] MS: Of course I wouldn't be at Capital B if I didn't think our approach to journalism was super critical for the future. Mainstream and a lot of the publications we came from as Capital B staffers are super important and critical to journalism. I also think carving out space like we have for looking at specific issues and really digging deep on them is pretty important. I think anything that allows more space for deep dives and complexity, I think is really important.

I know a Capital B, we talk a lot about the nuance just within the black community that really, in mainstream news coverage you don't get a lot of it. So how can we talk to different people who think different things and be comfortable in a gray area where there's maybe not a right or wrong or lots of different things are contributing or whatever that might look like. But journalism that holds more space for complexity and nuance, I think is really, really important.

[00:15:23] BB: I have a hard time thinking that will go away.

[00:15:27] MS: Yeah.

[00:15:28] BB: Maybe on the front of like, “Oh, breaking news or the saga continues with local news, do you need to know that there was a carjacking on 49th Street and Broadway?” Maybe there's less space for that, but the thoughtful, deep, well researched stuff. I really hope that prevails. It's going to be interesting to see what all happens.

[00:15:50] BB: Yeah.

[00:15:50] BB: Well, Margo. Thank you so much for being on here with us today. This was a lovely conversation. I hope people have listened and are sharpening their pencils for all the great doctors they can send you. Frankly, anything, because that's on your beat, because you are open and here for the pitches.

[00:16:09] MS: Yes, I really, I'm going to read it. I will open it, that I can promise. Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

[00:16:16] BB: Yes. Famous words. She will read it, everybody. Thanks, Margo.

[00:16:22] MS: Bye.

[OUTRO]

[00:16:25] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist featuring, Margo Snipe from Capitol B. If you enjoyed listening to our show, make sure to subscribe on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcasts and anywhere else you listen to podcasts. If you have a moment, please leave us a review to share your thoughts about the show and today's guests. To learn more about the latest tools on OnePitch and to subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter head our website at onepitch.co.

We'll see you all next week with a brand new guest and even more insights about the journalists you want to learn more about. Until then, start great stories.

[END]